

# SPIKE

## Your Brand ROI

How to  
Maximize Reputation  
and Get Results

ADELE CEHRS



**SPIKE YOUR  
BRAND ROI**

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# **SPIKE YOUR BRAND ROI**

**How to Maximize  
Reputation  
and Results**

**ADELE CEHRS**

**Foreword by Sam Horn**

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# Contents

<i>Foreword by Sam Horn</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>About the Author</i>	<i>xiii</i>

<b>1</b>	What's Real Brand Engagement?	1
<b>2</b>	Why Your Brand Doesn't Stand Out	7
<b>3</b>	Brand Narcissism	13
<b>4</b>	SPIKE Assessment	21
<b>5</b>	Be Nimble, Assemble the Right Team, and Get Buy-In for the SPIKE Method	25
<b>6</b>	Picking the Perfect Audiences and Crafting Compelling Messages	33
<b>7</b>	Manufacturing a SPIKE: Provide First-of-Their-Kind Pitches, Stories, and Messages	41
<b>8</b>	When Is Your Brand Truly Relevant? Turn Your Editorial Calendar into a Relevance Calendar	51
<b>9</b>	Brand Patience: Why You Need It	61
<b>10</b>	SPIKE Spotting	69
<b>11</b>	The Upshot of a Positive SPIKE	79
<b>12</b>	Finding the Lost Principle of Influence	87
<b>13</b>	Create a Contrarian Brand Platform to Stand Out	97

<b>14</b>	The Fairness Fallacy and How to Call a Time-Out When Things Go Bad	105
<b>15</b>	Have a Crisis Plan in Place to Handle Negative SPIKEs	115
<b>16</b>	The Real Benefits of Responding to or Ignoring Negative SPIKEs	119
<b>17</b>	Maximize (or Minimize) 15 Minutes (or Days) of Fame or Shame	125
<b>18</b>	Why Wait? Anticipate Negative SPIKEs	133
<b>19</b>	Don't Spin Out of Control, Manage the Viral Spiral	141
<b>20</b>	Dark Websites See the Light of Day	151
<b>21</b>	The Underdog versus Top Dog Effect: How Some Brands Pick Themselves Up and Come Back Stronger	161
<b>22</b>	The Pedestal Principle	169
<b>23</b>	Internal SPIKEs	177
<b>24</b>	Measuring the ROI of a SPIKE	185
	<i>SPIKE Spotting: Worksheets</i>	193
	<i>Bibliography</i>	207
	<i>Index</i>	217



## Foreword

Adele Cehrs attended a program I presented at ASAE's Annual Conference in Dallas, Texas, in which I introduced a method that shows how to create a one-of-a-kind competitive edge to make your priority project stand out in a crowded marketplace.

Adele was the star in one of our practice pitch sessions. I was impressed with her crackerjack smarts about the PR/marketing industry, and we continued our conversation following my program.

As soon as I heard about Adele's innovative approach for "Maximizing or Minimizing Your 15 Minutes of Fame or Shame," I told her, "That's a million-dollar idea. You've got to write a book about that."

Here it is!

Did you know *Advertising Age* reports there are 35 companies in the United States that spend more than \$1 billion on advertising every year? The list includes such household names as Disney, Apple, Ford, Comcast, and #1 ranked Procter and Gamble, which spends more than \$10 billion globally every year.

Think about it. That's the advertising budget for just 35 companies. That doesn't include the advertising, marketing, and PR budgets for all the other companies in the United States and worldwide. We're talking about hundreds of billions of dollars spent trying to influence buyer behavior.

The problem? As Adele reveals in this book, all that money that companies, associations, government agencies, and nonprofits spend on PR and marketing can come crashing down with one poorly managed crisis.

Because understand this: if you're in business, something will go wrong. It's only a matter of time. And, something will go right. Are you prepared to mitigate the PR fallout and damage of a disaster or leverage the positive potential of a success?

Imagine if you were able to predict the SPIKEs of media attention—for better or for worse. Imagine being able to mobilize a preprepared crisis management plan for when it hits the fan. Imagine being able to capitalize on favorable media buzz when your business, product, or CEO are in the news for good reasons. Imagine being able to triage your marketing dollars so you spend them only when you are top of mind with your target customers.

You don't have to imagine it. That is what Adele's book *SPIKE Your Brand ROI* is about to teach you. You're about to discover why premier companies such as Yum Brands, Lockheed Martin, and DuPont have hired Adele to guide their strategic marketing. You're about to discover why her speaking engagements are packed with fans who love her humor, interactive exercises, and pragmatic recommendations that they can use instantly to reap real-world results and revenue.

In case you're wondering, "What's a SPIKE?" a SPIKE is a Sudden Point of Interest that Kick-starts Exposure: It is a span of time when you and what you care about are thrust into the public eye. This can be cause for despair or cause for delight. By identifying your endgame and clarifying your goals and nonnegotiables, you can turn a SPIKE into a strategic platform that actually increases respect from your target audience—or you can sit back and get skewered.

If you care about your organization's reputation and profits, if you care about the continued respect of your employees, members, and customers, this book is a must-have. Read it and reap.

Sam Horn, Intrigue Expert,  
author of *Tongue Fu!* and *POP!*

## Preface

I've always considered timing and focus to be the platinum standard for any social media, PR, marketing, or advertising campaign. I had also always considered this to be automatic and as involuntary as breathing. But, when I started seeing tons of content that made no sense—people news-jacking stories that were completely wrong for their brand and the promise of engagement as a marketing silver bullet—I knew something had to change. When I embarked on this project, it struck me that too few people were actually successful at showing the value of their marketing efforts. On closer inspections, my suspicions were confirmed.

Social media experts and content marketers were recommending that brands create more content on more channels. PR firms and advertising agencies were fighting for dominance in the content marketing space—all while their clients saw little or no return on investment. The term *brand nurturing* became increasingly more popular, and little to no strategy regarding timing was considered. The public was drowning in content.

Moreover, news media were beginning to weigh in on brand crises like never before. How a brand responded or didn't respond became mainstream news. Additionally, media were reporting on how the public was reacting on social media related to brand incidents and opportunities.

Most people that I've met—I'm talking about top-tier CEOs and CMOs—who have created amazingly successful marketing campaigns were not throwing more content at the problem: they were actually creating fewer, more targeted messages that broke

through the noise. They used the newfound interest in brand response in the media and the public to propagate more coverage, viral content, and marketing initiatives that were heralded as “genius.” What was their secret? Turns out they were using SPIKEs in a way to capture a brand moment.

So, I was onto something. I’ve assembled the very finest practices in this book, along with a free online, continually updated appendix of resources, unlikely sources, and unlikely results—all from the standpoint of pursuing timing and focus—SPIKEs, that is, as though they were the lifeblood of marketing success. Which they are.

The problem is that many of you are not taking care of this most basic element of effective marketing. Fortunately, you’ve come to the right place for a methodology that will get your organization back on track. You might not like the rigor, but you’ll thank me when you are creating stellar campaigns that win awards, praise, and industry recognition.

## Acknowledgments

I want to personally thank all of the corporate and association partners who shared their insights and enriched this book with their experience and knowledge. I'd also like to sincerely thank my staff at Epic PR Group, especially Jenna Gregory-Sperry, for all of their contributions to this book. A special thank-you goes to Sam Horn, who gave me the courage to bring this book to life.

Also, thank you to Suzi Wirtz for her insightful and meticulous editing talent.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to make this a collective success.

*To my husband and my daughter, Erik and Sienna Cehrs, to whom  
I am eternally grateful for their love and support.*

*And to my parents, Jack and Lorraine Gambardella, who inspired  
the dreamer in me.*

## About the Author

**Adele Cehrs**, the owner of Epic PR Group, has served as PR strategist, corporate counsel, and crisis-management advisor for clients such as Yum Brands, DirectTV, Dole, Johnson and Johnson, DuPont, Lockheed Martin, Verizon, Monster, Georgetown Cupcake, Sara Lee, and the Convention Industry Council. Prior to owning her own company, Adele was an executive at top PR firms in New York City and Washington, DC, including TSI Communications and Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, and served as a spokesperson for companies such as DuPont, 1-800-Flowers, Transwestern Properties, MCI/WorldCom, and DirectTV.

She is a frequent media expert for CNN Headline News, NPR, Fox Business, CBS, NBC, Voice of America, *Inc.*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *PRWeek*, *Forbes*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Entrepreneur* and has media-trained numerous CEOs, including Ted Leonsis, Marilyn Hewson (CEO of Lockheed Martin), and Steve Case. Adele also secured a reality show for Georgetown Cupcake called *DC Cupcakes* that airs on TLC.

Adele has spoken at hundreds of conferences including ASAE, Convention Industry Council, Inc. 500, IABC, PRSA, Digital Now, EO, the Global Social Media Conference in Boston, Las Vegas, and Dallas, and the Canadian Board of Trade. She was a top-rated speaker at ASAE's Marketing, Membership, and Communications Conference in 2011, 2012, and 2013.

Perhaps most important, Adele is considered a thought leader in her industry because she has catapulted virtually unknown businesses into becoming multimillion-dollar household names, including 1-800-Flowers.com and Georgetown Cupcake. She has codified her disruptive process into a step-by-step, replicable methodology called SPIKE that has received rave reviews from audiences and dramatic results for clients.



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BRAND ROI**





## What's Real Brand Engagement?

*“A brand for a company is like a reputation for a person.  
You earn reputation by trying to do hard things well.”*

—JEFF BEZOS, founder of Amazon and owner of the  
*Washington Post*

Imagine this.

You're going about your day, scanning through the online news site, your feeds on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Some things you like, some things you share, you might comment here and there, some things you just scroll past, others you click through. This is what we call engagement. And this is great for brands. Right?

But fast-forward ten minutes. Twenty minutes. An hour. Maybe you remember one or two bits of content you saw today, but only because you're thinking about it.

Come dinner time, you've completely forgotten that you really loved the Papa John's heart-shaped pizza post on Facebook today, because you feel like tacos for dinner and barely remember you even saw it. **Do you really have any idea which brands engaged you today?**

It's estimated that people see five thousand brand messages a day, according to CMO.com. How do you break through the noise? How do you create real perception and behavior change? The first step is to remove the clutter and **focus on what really matters.**

## Did You Know?

- In the United States alone it's estimated that businesses spend **\$155 billion annually on advertising and PR** to get a brand into the public eye (Galant 2012).
- Research shows that marketers are getting worse, not better, at directing their dollars, with **a whopping 40 percent of marketing dollars being wasted each year** (Neff 2012).
- That means **\$62 billion is misused** on content that is not relevant or producing ROI.

Tens of billions in wasted marketing every year. It's not smart. It's not strategic. Yet as evidenced by these alarming statistics, that's what many companies are doing. What if there were a better way? What if you could focus your energy and resources and money only when you are truly top of mind? What if you could have a higher spend-to-impact ratio? That is what *SPIKE Your Brand ROI* will teach you.

If you know how to prepare for, spot, and capitalize on a SPIKE—a Sudden Point of Interest that Kick-starts Exposure—you will learn how to:

- Mitigate the damage or maximize the benefits by anticipating when you or your company, association, or nonprofit is going to be of interest
- Decrease your marketing spend while increasing your bottom-line benefits
- Prevent a public perception of catastrophe that damages the goodwill you spent years creating

Some experts tell you that it's vital for your organization to drop everything you are doing to respond to every comment or issue within your bailiwick. The truth is that your executives want—and need—some level of planning, ideation, and strategy before they commit to a position. The way to do that is to understand when your audience has the highest point of interest, a SPIKE. While it may sound impossible to make predictions about a brand's relevance, the truth is that brands have discernible patterns. Those patterns are driven by audience interests and outside events that require some real-time nimbleness.

The Consumer Electronics Association experiences a positive SPIKE every year with its world-renowned International Consumer Electronics Show—a technology smorgasbord of the goodies early adopters will be drooling over next year. More than 150,000 people flock to it from a variety of industries to see what's next or what's garnering buzz in consumer electronics.

General Motors experiences a negative SPIKE when it recalls millions of cars.

But what if you had more control, more ability to influence these SPIKEs?

You can.

People are interested in hearing from a brand when that brand has something to say that pertains to their lives—everything else you do in between is just a buildup or build down to major brand opportunities or crises. You might be thinking, “I’m not Consumer Electronics Association or General Motors, so how can I relate to such big-brand examples?” The process is the same for any entity handling issues or opportunities. You can learn from some of the big guys’ mistakes.

We’re flipping the traditional business communication model on its head. For decades, companies have been able to dictate when they are relevant to mainstream media. Now the audience dictates when they will care. It isn’t just engagement for engagement’s sake. It is about timing and knowing when your audience wants to hear from you.

## What Exactly Is a SPIKE?

William Jennings Bryan once said, “Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.” That is SPIKE—not something to wait around for, but something that you, your organization, and your marketing/PR team can achieve with the right tools and knowledge.

A SPIKE is a *Sudden Point of Interest that Kick-starts Exposure*. It is the opportunity to make or break you and your organization. It is a point in time when your industry, profession, or members are thrust into the public eye ... for better or for worse.

**S** – Stands for Sudden

Communication that suddenly pops up doesn't qualify as a SPIKE unless it clearly meets two criteria: the opportunity that arises is central to your brand's message and the communication can be relayed to your audience within a finite, specific period of time.

**P** – Stands for Point

There is a point, a single shining point in time, when you have the opportunity to change the conversation. To capitalize on the SPIKE you have to be nimble. You must react quickly and effectively to get the optimum benefit from sudden attention, a time when all eyes are on you, your company, or your cause. If you are quick and you have the right message, you can provide a solution, reaction, or point of view that is uniquely yours. If you're really good, you can even come to own a topic, and that can be a gold mine for months or years.

**I** – Stands for Interest

The word *interest*, as a verb, means to excite curiosity or attention. Your audience, not your executive staff or board, must be interested in the topic. Too many times, organizations forget that in this decade, the audience is in control of when they will tune you out or sing your praises.

**K** – Stands for Kick-starts

To kick-start something is to cause it to catch on or take off. In a SPIKE, you can kick-start attention by being the first and best to respond in real time to an evolving issue in the media, your industry, or your profession.

**E** – Stands for Exposure

Exposure can be a positive or negative in marketing. If you don't control a SPIKE, if you do not have a plan of attack and excellent operational timing, you can leave your organization exposed to a negative SPIKE and create significant vulnerabilities. However, if applied correctly, you can anticipate those vulnerabilities and perhaps even benefit from them with strategic positioning and perfectly timed messages.

## Relevance and Timing

Here's the bad news. Any company, cause, or creation, regardless of scope or scale, is only truly relevant to its audience a few times a year. That's it.

I am not talking about basic marketing and PR; that's what we marketers are paid to do at the most elementary level. I am not even talking about the marketing opportunities through the year with small to medium impact; those aren't SPIKES.

I am talking about the moments when what you say and what you do has a major impact on your customers' business, behavior, and market—those select moments that transform campaigns, initiatives, and ideas into a remarkable shift in perception. That doesn't happen every day, and it shouldn't.

A SPIKE isn't like accounting or other orderly business functions that follow a specific pattern year in and year out. SPIKES don't happen on a neat timetable such as quarterly, seasonally, or when your marketing team has time. They happen based on seemingly spontaneous market or media demands.

Now, I know you don't want a mediocre organization, or you'd have put this book down several pages ago. You don't want average results. You know you can't just keep doing what you are doing. But there's more to riding a SPIKE than that. It's a terrifying experience.

If you follow the advice I'm presenting in this book, it can go so right that you create game-changing wins that will elevate your career. It's not completely predictable, but if you seek epic results, read on.







## Why Your Brand Doesn't Stand Out

*"The only limit to your impact is your imagination and commitment."*

—TONY ROBBINS

For those of you who are thinking, "But experts say we need to engage with people all the time because we need to create value all the time," my answer is, "No, you don't!" It is a form of brand narcissism to think people want to be engaged or communicated with *all* the time. People have too much content coming at them to tell when your messages really matter. And you are so busy communicating value that you miss big opportunities to challenge, exceed executive expectations, and create results that change behaviors and shift perceptions.

A recent Gallup Mobile Retail Panel Study conducted in January 2013 asked, "How much does social media impact your purchasing decisions?" Results showed that only 5 percent of people said that "social media had a great deal of influence over their purchasing decision." And, 63 percent said social had "no influence at all" (Swift 2014) (see figure 2.1).

In another yearlong study from the New Brunswick, NJ-based research firm the Keller Fay Group, 91 percent of respondents said they get information about brands as a result of face-to-face conversations or over the phone (Belicove 2011).

Moreover, a study published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* in 2014, titled "Why Recommend a Brand Face-to-Face but Not on Facebook," looked at differences between word-of-mouth